



MUNICIPAL BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION/TREE BOARD

Time/Place: June 14, 2022 1:00 pm at Municipal Parking Bldg 1

Members Present: Ms. Amy McLaughlin
Ms. Marlene Dial
Ms. Bobbi Holland
Ms. Anna Forbes
Mr. Alex Franklin
Ms. Lois Crichton
Ms. Brenda Ellis
Ms. Donna Graham
Ms. Susan Shumate
Ms. Marjorie Cooke

Members Absent: Ms. Jane Powell, excused

Staff and Guests: Mr. Mike Davis, Public Grounds Deputy Director
Ms. Louisa Swift, resident on Kanawha Blvd interested in Ruffner Park

The meeting was called to order by Chair, Ms. McLaughlin and the minutes of the May 3, 2022 meeting were approved as emailed.

Ms. Graham, Treasurer, reported a balance of \$132,859.36.

Ms. McLaughlin shared 3 updates that don't require action. First, Ms. McLaughlin submitted a letter of support to the mayor on behalf of the Green Team who has submitted their request to the mayor's office for the Tree City USA designation. The official contract with GAI to redo Ruffner Park was submitted and signed by the city on May 31. Last, still waiting for an update for filling the position vacated by Otis Laury.

Guest Louisa Swift attended as a resident on Kanawha Blvd and wanted an update on Ruffner Park. We offered her a detailed update on the Ruffner Park redesign and invited her to attend future meetings as more plans for the park come along.

Continuous Learning – Memorial Tree Program (shared from Ms. McLaughlin):

“Today's topic of memorial trees is our last continuous learning of MBC responsibilities. As I hope you recall from previous meetings, we covered the other four primary responsibilities: Special Projects, Passive Parks, Public Right-of-Way Permits, and Tree Board Duties.

As we've discussed before, the Municipal Beautification Commission was created initially to address the landscaping of Kanawha Boulevard in anticipation of the WV Centennial Celebration at the state capitol.

A plan was commissioned to plant 1000 trees starting in 1961 on the East End (Elk River to Michigan Ave) and continuing in 1962 to the West Side (Elk River to Patrick Street Bridge).

There was some public backlash about planting trees along the boulevard - concerns that trees would obscure the long, graceful panorama of the river. Through newspaper reports, MBC shared that the boulevard plan was deliberately designed not to obscure, but to frame the best vistas. It was not a row-type planting but natural intermittent plantings, groupings of trees set out with distances of a half bloc to two blocs separating each. Small trees were planted near the bottom and large trees on top.

The "Permanent Living Memorial" program was a community building and fundraising component of the plan. Anyone could buy a memorial tree on the boulevard for \$10 - \$25, depending on the species of tree. Species available were sugar maple, oriental plane tree, flowering crabapple, dogwood, and various evergreens. The cost also included a certificate and installed plaque.

The program was initiated when Mayor Shanklin gave a check to the MBC chairman, Robert Otten on March 21, 1961, in honor of his only son who died in Germany in WWII. A special telephone number was designated for ordering memorial trees.

Memorial trees were sold to garden clubs, businesses, private and public organizations and individuals. Trees were purchased in the memorial of former mayors, fallen firefighters, and beloved relatives.

I'm not sure how many memorial trees have been sold over the years, and I can find no mention of the memorial tree program in the city code. I believe the last one was sold in 2017."

MBC Financial Strategy – because we have not had this much money in our budget is so far past, we need to come up with a good financial strategy, including understanding what our goals are given that we don't have a steady flow of income, we don't have many contingencies, and we don't have any liabilities. We need to decide how much money we want to keep in reserve and how much we want to use for various projects.

Our goals, per city code, are:

"It shall be the duty of the beautification commission to advise and recommend to the mayor or the city council such programs or projects as would, in the opinion of the commission, improve the beauty and general welfare of the city. The mayor or the council may request the advice or cooperation of the commission for any project or program connected with the beautification, cleanliness, or general welfare of the city. It shall be the duty of the commission to recommend maintenance and rules of Davis Park, Shanklin Park, Elk River Park and Ruffner."

It was mutually decided that \$16,000 would be a good contingency reserve amount and \$45,000 earmarked for the Ruffner Park project (\$9,000 is already spent for the design). Ms. Forbes shared Kanawha Garden Club has a \$10,000 restoration grant and also did a fundraiser netting approximately \$7500, both designated for Ruffner Park. There is a likelihood of neighborhood donations towards this as well as Ms. Dial offering to do fundraising events in her apartment for her building. Ms. Crichton shared multiple ideas (grant writing for cultural element, memorial connections, possible reaching out to the Bullitt and Ruffner families that have connections) for grass roots fundraising, encouraging buy-in and ownership from residents.

The remainder (approximately \$62,000) of our account would be designated for future projects.

Davis Park Benches – Ms. Forbes, representing Kanawha Garden Club, had sent us pictures of the benches in Davis Park to show the deterioration of the existing benches. Thoughts are to remove the existing benches, in part because of their condition and that fact that they are vagrant magnets, and replacing them with the a more modern metal benches with seating dividers, called “urban planning hostile architecture”. Mr. Webster looked into these a few years ago and they ran around \$1700 each. Perhaps start with replacing with 10 of these. She thinks that the city should redesign Davis Park because it’s not an attractive place right now. The dead tree that is in there needs to be removed. Mr. Webster shared (even though he wasn’t in attendance) they only want to move forward with the metal benches with dividers. He asked the mayor if there was a separate pot of money to fund this project but the mayor indicated that this should be part of the beautification fund. It was decided to get the drawings of the park for the next meeting to get a better idea of how many benches would be needed and to keep this in mind for a future project.

Public Arts Director’s Report – Mr. Pierson was not in attendance today

Public Grounds Director’s Report – Mr. Davis reported the living wall is in and doing well, even if there was a change in the flowers used. Thanks to the Master Gardens, the hanging baskets were planted and now waiting to get the hangers put up. Flowers are going in the beds, starting with Court St. 14 trees went down from the storm the night before, so that’s on the front burner. All special projects are on hold by written order until after Regatta.

Additional business – none, but on next month’s agenda will be discussing Ruffner Park, specifically to talk about the traditional Appalachian memorial plants that will be used to refer to GAI, and the position of consulting horticulturist.

Due to the holiday, the next scheduled meeting date will be moved to July 12.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25 pm.